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Encouragement for Babes in the Church.

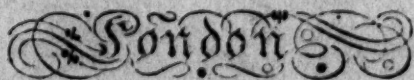
A
S E R M O N
PREACHED

AT THE
NEW JERUSALEM TEMPLE,
IN RED-CROSS-STREET,
NEAR CRIPPLEGATE, LONDON,
Jan. 24, 1796=40,

On ISAIAH XXXV. 3, 4.

STRENGTHEN YE THE WEAK HANDS, AND CONFIRM THE
FEEBLE KNEES. SAY TO THEM THAT ARE OF A
FEARFUL HEART, BE STRONG, FEAR NOT.

By MANOAH SIBLY, N.H.S.
AND SERVANT OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.



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S E R M O N V I I I .
E N C O U R A G E M E N T
F O R
B A B E S I N T H E C H U R C H .

I S A I A H X X X V . 3 , 4 .

*Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm
the feeble knees. Say to them that are of
a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not.*

O U R text presents before us a word of comfort, and a word of advice : a word of comfort to such, who perceive and feel their deficiency in the spiritual warfare ; because, when the Lord appears most at a distance, he is more especially near, and he can only manifest his strength in our behalf, as we are sensible of our weakness. Also, a word of advice to such who may have arrived to some degree of regeneration, have attained to some love of good in the affec-

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tions of their wills, and to some perception of truth in their understandings ; how they should act towards those, who may not as yet have arrived to any sensible enjoyment of this union of goodness and truth in their souls ; who as yet are but babes and sucklings, but in whom also the Lord, after they have been nourished up to every good word and work, can perfect strength. To both these characters are the words of our text applicable, “ Strengthen ye the weak hands, confirm the feeble knees ; say unto them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not.” To which words we will now apply our consideration, taking them in the order in which they lie before us : the first thing that calls for our attention being, “ Strengthen ye the weak hands.”

By the hands, in holy writ, is always signified the ability to operate ; the hand being that member, more particularly, whereby the man performs all his actions. Solomon plainly uses it in this sense, in Ecclesi. ix. 10. “ Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might ; for there is no work,
nor

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nor device, nor knowledge in the grave, whither thou goest." This signification may also be fully confirmed from that well known declaration of our Lord, after his glorification, "All power is given into my hands, in heaven and on earth;" whence it is manifest, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the hand means the power and the ability to operate.

The word in our text is not singly a hand, but hands; in the original in the dual number, meaning two hands, which leads our ideas to the two-fold powers and ability of operation of those, concerning whom the words are spoken; first, with regard to the will and affections, and secondly, the understanding and thoughts.

These are the two hands in man, that is, as to his spiritual man, from whence flows the activity of the natural, that from the will and affections he might operate all that is good, and from the understanding and thoughts operate all that is true, whereby he becomes an image and likeness of the Lord, when the internal and external hands
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are thus united in good and heavenly uses; but, alas! agreeable to the language of our text, these hands have become weak; a direful fall has taken place; and the inclination to love and act what is good and true, is not a flower that flourishes in nature's garden, or rather, wilderness. Man, of himself, is all that is opposite and contrary to what is good and true; but the Lord, notwithstanding, in mercy has a ground for himself in the very center of the soul, and this he lays more especially in the tender years of infancy; wherefrom, he is ever striving to form a conscience, and when formed, to direct him the road to happiness, as his understanding is enlightened, and his affections enlivened with the goods and truths of heaven.

But this power of operation is weak, and more especially so at this period, in consequence of the amazing depth of the fall into which mankind are sunk; therefore, the word in our text is, "Strengthen ye the weak hands." Do we ask, how is this to be done, how the ability of doing good, and believing truth, is to be confirmed? By the
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very same way that we would strengthen a weak limb, namely, by exercising it; at least, by the endeavour so to do; for, however feeble the ability to operate in spiritual things may appear, still we have to recollect, that the everlasting arms are underneath all our weak efforts; and he that says, "Strengthen ye the weak hands," will most assuredly bless the pious means, if we use them with elevated hearts to him as the omnipotent friend of sinners.

Here some may be ready to say, that they feel themselves so very weak, that they cannot in the least operate any thing that is good or true.

It is true, man of himself cannot thus operate; but we ought to remember, that our soul is a divine spark from the Deity itself, for we are told in the book of creation, that the Lord God breathed into man the breath of lives, and man became a living soul; therefore, whatever good or truth is operated by man, is only done so by appearance, the reality being, that it is of and from the
Lord

Lord in man ; therefore, the Lord being so near, nay, having a seat in our very hearts, he is always at hand to assist in every holy and pious endeavour for our Maker's glory, and our neighbour's good. He tells us, " Behold, I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear my voice, I will open the door ;" and he waits to be gracious. Let us beware of an inactive life in religion : in conjunction with our endeavour, (and without we resolve to begin the endeavour, we shall never get our weak hands strengthened,) the Lord can operate all things conducive to our salvation here, and our everlasting felicity in heaven hereafter ; but without our co-operation, the Lord can do nothing, and we shall at length, if we thus continue all through life in an inactive state, as to striving after spiritual blessings, merit the reward of the man who hid his Lord's talent in a napkin, who was, thereupon, commanded to be bound hand and foot, and cast into outer darkness, there shall be weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

The first operation of the will towards strengthening it's hand, it's power for to do good,

good, is to put away evil; so far as we put away evil, we do good; but here the hand at first is weak, it may not perhaps be good done from a genuine motive; that, let us remember, we are not to tarry for; to wait for doing good till we can do it with a better motive than that we now possess, is a dangerous procrastination; it is putting off that for to-morrow which we ought to do to-day, and which we know not we may have to-morrow to do it in, and all the time the hand is continually growing weaker and weaker; for there is nothing strengthens the weak hand with respect to the operation of good, but actually so far as we are able, with the best motive we can raise, to put all the good we know into practice; and that whether the good be of a religious, moral, or civil kind. Whilst we thus attend to our duty because it is our duty, although it may at first arise from a fear of hell, we shall find at length the arm so to become strengthened, that we shall rise in our motive, not as formerly, doing good from fear of hell, nor even as the next step, for the sake of going to heaven; but for the sake of good, in the conti-

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nuance of which the hand becomes no more weak, but is strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

It is the same case with the operation of truth. Here it may be necessary to observe, that truth in it's operation is charity towards our neighbour, the grand emblem of which is to do to all as we would wish to be done to by others in like circumstances. This is called the operation of truth, in distinction to the love of the Lord in the soul, and the seeking his glory and honour above all things, which properly is the operation of good. There are two distinct operations in the mind, as the operations of the will and the understanding; but the nature of strengthening the weak hands, the ability to operate in either case, is exactly the same; therefore shall not again go over the ground we have laid.

We come now to the next thing in our text, given us as a word of advice and exhortation, *And confirm the feeble knees.*

In considering of which, it is necessary
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that we speak to the correspondence of the knee to the spiritual things in man, in order to gain the import of what the Word here inculcates. In which, by the knee we are to understand those mediums whereby the man from natural may become celestial.

To the man who may not as yet have reflected on the fearful and wonderful frame of his internal spiritual man, it may not have appeared that there is such a medium ; but it will to the man who has considered within himself on the nature of his soul and mind, and at the same time has entered the new birth : to him it must and will appear plain, because he knows experimentally, that man does not from natural instantaneously become spiritual ; much less from the natural instantaneously become celestial. There are degrees to pass through before man, from a lover of self, and respecting that alone, becomes a lover of the Lord, and respects his kingdom alone. It is not in the nature of man, from birth, to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. His inclination is to put self, self-dominion, self-honours, self.

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self-pleasures, in the first place; and the kingdom of God and his righteousness in the last: in short, to place the love of self at the head, and the love of the Lord under his feet.

The reason why the knee means the mediums, conducive to make this great change in the love and affections, is, because it is the medium in the human form between the leg and the thigh; the leg meaning natural, and the thigh celestial, or more properly celestial spiritual love, the principle of conjugal love with the spiritual kingdom of the Lord, the mediums to which are represented by the knees.

When we say this is the meaning of the leg and knee, we mean in regard to correspondence with the Grand Man of heaven; for, as hinted before, with the wicked, the natural man alone, the order is inverted, and therefore the inhabitants of the hells are as antipodes with respect to the heavens.

The mediums between the natural and the celestial spiritual man, and also between the
natural

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natural and the formation of the celestial spiritual, are many; the two principal of which are the rational and the spiritual; and therefore the word knees in our text is in the plural number. By the rational, man has the power of understanding what is good or evil, truth or falsehood; and by the spiritual, the power of choosing the same, introducing it into the will, and making it the man's own, when man first becomes celestial spiritual.

The same as observed before, of the ability of acting good and truth, when exemplifying the meaning of the hands, we may apply to the knees, the power being the same in each; but the specific difference is, that the knees respect the power of understanding and choosing, and the hands of acting. The design of our Creator is, from our formation, that our knees should lead us by our feet to him, that we should be swallowed up in him as our all and in all, our life and supreme love; but these are things that the natural man knows nothing about, and are only to be found in the man who has followed the Lord in the regeneration, and who has
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overcome in the spiritual warfare; because they loved not their lives of evil and falsehood, even unto the death. They have, thro' an all-conquering divine human, come out of great tribulation, and washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, his blood there meaning his divine truth, which, together with his flesh, which is divine good, by continual efflux or outgoings from his glorified body, he giveth for the life of the world.

The rational and the spiritual principle in man by nature, as the knees, are feeble, as well as his hands are weak. Nay, they are so feeble, that the natural man scarce knows they exist. But they must be called forth, and excited to do their office, in order that the feeble knees may be strengthened, and the man at the same time be going on from grace to grace, till at length inverted from nature's order, the seed that was buried underneath, the first life of God in the soul, the latent divine spark, not only shoots downwards into a root, but springs upwards, spreads forth it's branches, at length blossoms and produces
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new seeds, thirty, sixty, or an hundred fold: thus that which was beneath, or the lowest, comes forth above, and rises to the summit.

The way to strengthen the rational and spiritual faculties in man, is to lay before him the genuine truths of the Word; for without truth or knowledge, as the wise man says, the heart cannot be good; and there is no real good in the mind of man, nor any real good operation performed by him, unless done from an enlightened principle of rationality, received from the Lord as the sun of heaven, and also done from a spiritual ground, namely, from the love of heaven, that is, the love of uses. Whatever thus comes within the view of our rational powers, it becomes us therefrom to distinguish between good and evil, truth and falsehood, the sweet from the bitter, the light from the darkness; and then the spiritual principle takes up it's office, which is to choose what is good and true, the sweet and the light, discarding the evil and the false, the bitter and the dark, elevate it into the will by living according to it, where it will then be loved

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loved and delighted in, as that which comes from God and leads to God, the rational faculty in man being the discerning power of the mind as to what is good and true, and the spiritual being the chusing and determining power to live accordingly.

When we look round—let me rather say, when we look within, and see and feel how weak and feeble these faculties have been and are in our souls, how very prone to run into evil and falsehood without any reflection, chusing that in our dark estate as preferable to heavenly good and truth, acting accordingly, and thereby elevating it into our will:—when we thus look within, how proper and suitable is the advice and word of comfort before us, and how much we may see the necessity of using all the means put into our power, both to strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees!

That nothing might here be wanting on the Lord's part, he has given us the holy Word from himself, more especially in these last times given us the exposition of that Word,

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as to it's internal spiritual sense, that thereby his new and rising church, which is to be called the New Jerusalem, and to be the everlasting dispensation of love to the children of men, shall no longer remain in doubt, suspense, and perplexity, as to the genuine truths that belong to the rational and spiritual man, and the apparent truths that belong to the natural man. The light being fully equal to the heat, the man of the church may now so have his weak hands strengthened, and his feeble knees confirmed, that he may without any difficulty distinguish good and truth, chuse it and act it in justice with judgment, under the influence of the Lord God the Saviour of men.

As one principal means also of strengthening and confirming these, the Lord has also instituted the public ordinances of his house, in attendance to all of which, in a pious frame, the Lord unseen strengthens the weak hands, and confirms the feeble knees, by being thereby able to implant states of goodness and truth, which though, from various causes perhaps, both internal
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and external, may not blossom in this life, yet they shall in the other; where, as from a store-house, they shall be fully brought forth, and man experience in their enjoyment all the felicities of heaven resulting. For in another life, all our states of life return, whether states of evil and false, or states of goodness and truth. If then we have died principled in heavenly affections, when the states of evil and false arise, we put them from us, consigning them to hell: on the contrary, when states of goodness and truth return, making one with our affections, we make them our own; and as we thus make them our own, they enter into us, and we into them, in which consists all the felicity of heaven, every state of good and truth being from and of the Lord, who alone is the felicity of heaven and eternal life.

We now come to the last word of comfort and advice in our text, *Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not.* Here we must also recur to the science of correspondences, as before, for the meaning of the word heart, whereby the remaining part of
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the sentence will be rendered plain and intelligible.

By heart, in the spiritual sense of the Word, we are to understand the internal man as distinct from the external, which internal man is his will, from whence flow his loves and affections. That this is the general meaning of the word heart, may be proved from David, in his 51st Psalm, and 10th verse, where he thus prays: "*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me;*" where it is evident, that by a clean heart he means pure clean heavenly affections, in opposition to the impure, adulterous, infernal affections, he had been exercising in the affair of Bathsheba; and by a right spirit there is meant a true understanding. It may also be proved to have the same signification, from the Lord's promise to his church in Jeremiah, chap. xxxii. ver. 39, "And I will give them one heart, and one way," that is, one affection set on things above, and one walk and conversation in life. Hence when our text says, "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong," the

address is to such as are of fearful affections ; and the address is particularly to the babes in the church, the same as in the former part of our text, who will have fearful affections, whilst the cloud of natural appearances exists within their own breast, and outwardly also presents itself to their view in the letter of the Word, from which causes their fears will be various and many, all arising from the natural view which is presented before them of the nature of the Lord, his ways and works with the children of men.

They will, for instance, fear that the Lord does not love them as he does others, because of the appearances which the natural sense of the Word presents, of the Lord hating and being angry with the wicked ; the tempter hiding as much as possible from their view, that the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works ; the tempter hiding from the sight of the mind, that it would be contrary to the nature of the Deity to hate, that it is a thing utterly impossible to be done by that Being, whose essence is pure love in the very abstract, and that the appearance

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pearance is alone in the conception of the natural mind, which judgeth of the nature of things from effects, not being able to see the cause from whence all righteous judgment commenceth.

From hence also there is induced a fear of death and eternal condemnation,—a fear that the man shall never arrive safe in heaven at last,—a fear likewise induced by the adversary, who is ever going about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, in order, by making the mind to fix it's attention on to-morrow, to take it off it's guard to-day, which is the grand thing of our lives we are called to be solicitous about, leaving the morrow to him who finally fixes our state, as we improve the day. Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof: by taking care for the day, we grow strong for the morrow; nay, the Lord provides for the morrow, and he can alone do that, as we take care of the day. It is our present duty that ought to fix our attention, and as we are engaged in that, the anxiousness for the morrow will cease: for the care of the present will be swallowed up in the present, and the calmness, the
peace,

peace, the serenity that succeeds in our minds from a consciousness of having performed our duty, drives away all other unnecessary fears, whether belonging to the things of this life, or that which is to come; so that our souls find that peace within, which is alone a foretaste of heaven in a brighter and better state above. Thus the fearful heart grows strong, and comes into the state described in our text, by *fear not*. The fear is turned into love; that is, instead of, as heretofore, a fear of self, as the fears hitherto mentioned are, there will be the fear of the object beloved. Thither the fear is now transferred; not a fear of his anger—of his judgments—that he will at last spurn them from his presence; no such thoughts as these now occupy the mind, the love is changed, and with that the fear. The fear now is, lest the object of their love should be hurt, lest his glory should be trampled under foot, lest his name should not be revered; and for this they look as much within as without, watching against every thought that should tend to cast him down from the supreme throne, and against every affection but what directs it's course to him

him as it's center. Therefore, they are now said to fear not, that is, they have not a natural fear, but a spiritual one, and which taking it's rise from love into the Lord, cannot but be altogether of a different nature and quality, as heaven is from hell.

To conclude: from what has been observed from this part of the Word of the Lord, we see what great encouragements are held out to such as are seeking their way to run with their faces thitherward. All the love and all the wisdom of the Lord is engaged on their side; there is nothing wanting but our setting in with the design; and what is he waiting to be gracious for, but that we should put in practice the powers we have, that we use the present capacity, for that is all that is required, with the best motive we can, and the Lord will set in with the work; he will increase the capacity, he will elevate the motive, and from natural, by perseverance, we shall arise, by the medium of the rational and spiritual, to the celestial spiritual; nay, to be wholly a celestial man, the Lord providing our mansion without in
heaven,

heaven, as we are prepared in our state within. Thus striving, thus persevering, and thus overcoming, we shall not fail to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling; at the same time shall place the crown alone where all honour is due, believing that it is not of ourselves, abstractedly considered, but only as of ourselves; the Lord alone, without whom we can do nothing, working in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure. Thus, and thus alone, shall our weak hands, our power of operation, be strengthened; our feeble knees, our power of discerning good and truth, and elevating it into our affections and loves, be confirmed; whilst proportionably will our fearful heart be strong, our fear from being natural, a fear for ourselves, will become heavenly, a fear for the Lord arising from an ardent love into him, that the object of our love may not be injured by us in thought, word, or deed; and the glory of the change shall be alone attributed to the mighty arm of our Saviour and Redeemer.

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Now to our Lord Jesus Christ be glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen.

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